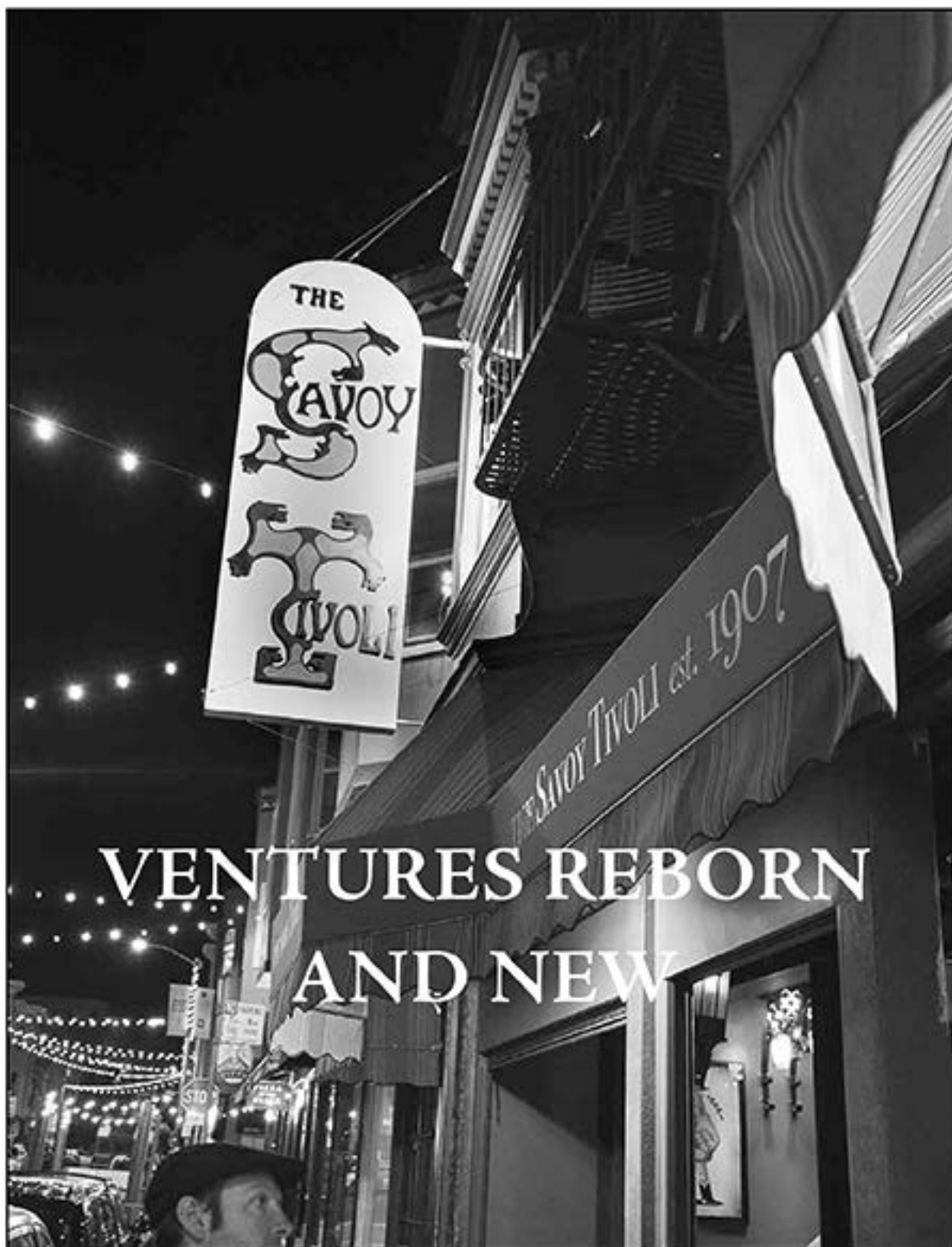


The Semaphore

A Publication of the TELEGRAPH HILL DWELLERS

Issue 240

Winter 2023



VENTURES REBORN
AND NEW

KIDS CORNER

by Sarah Kliban
kids@thd.org

Welcome to Kids Corner! THD wants to hear from kids in the neighborhood! If you'd like to ask a question, or you're a kid and want to be interviewed, please contact us at kids@thd.org.



JAYDEN BARAHONA, 10

What would be the perfect gift for you?

"Bendy and the Dark Revival.' It's a new video game. The new version and the original version. It has some of my favorite characters."

What is your favorite thing to do with your family around the holidays?

"Opening presents. Just watching a cool movie would be nice."

What is something that most people don't know about you?

"Drawing. I like drawing anything, but I'm used to drawing video game characters the most."

What is something you dream of doing someday?

"Owning a Lamborghini. A blue one specifically. I'd like to go racing."

What is your favorite place to hang out in San Francisco?

"My house. It's comfortable. I have a dog. I get to play video games with my friends."

Join the
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Dwellers!



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and become part of this
active community!



HUNTER LUNG, 8

What would be the perfect gift for you?

"Having a sister! I could play with her. I love little kids! My family feels crazy about that."

What is your favorite thing to do with your family around the holidays?

"Ice skating. In San Francisco and Alameda. I go, then wait two weeks, and I'm very bad at it again. It's fun to be on the ice and glide."

What is something that most people don't know about you?

"I have two dogs. Bowie is a Blue Merle, and Sumo is a Brindle."

What is something you dream of doing someday?

"Going to Hawaii. It's really hot there. There's a big ocean, many pools, and you can go outside in a bathing suit. I like swimming and I like hotness."

What is your favorite place to hang out in San Francisco?

"The beach. Crissy Field beach. You can find a lot of shells there, and you can see the Golden Gate Bridge. There are lots of dogs, and you can wear a bathing suit!"



LEV SHCHERBAKOVA, 8

What would be the perfect gift for you?

"iPhone 14. I can film short stories and upload them. Like a video blogger."

What is your favorite thing to do with your family

around the holidays?

"I like meeting up with my friends over the holidays. And opening presents!"

What is something that most people don't know about you?

"I don't have the greatest behavior. People might think I'm serious and sad like at school. I like to joke. Also, I moved here from Moscow 3 months ago."

What is something you dream of doing someday?

"I'd like to meet all the YouTube bloggers from around the world. I want to be a YouTube blogger someday."

What is your favorite place to hang out in San Francisco?

"I like to visit two museums—the Creativity Museum and The Exploratorium. I love all the science stuff."



DONALD XIE, 10

What would be the perfect gift for you?

"A vacation to China to see the Great Wall of China. And Beijing. I saw a picture of it once and really liked it. I'd probably eat a lot."

What is your favorite thing to do with your family around the holidays?

"At New Year's, we go to a party and eat a lot. I get red envelopes with money."

What is something that most people don't know about you?

"I play with Legos with my little brother Nathan. I really like Legos. I usually build them and then break them 'cause I get bored. And I went to Hollywood with my family."

What is something you dream of doing someday?

"Someday I will help my mom and dad to go on a really big vacation."

What is your favorite place to hang out in San Francisco?

"I like Joe DiMaggio Park. It's really big, and it's not that dirty unless you go to where there's the huge fish. And I love my house."



PRESIDENT'S CORNER

by Al Fontes
President@thd.org

This is the last column I will write as President of the Telegraph Hill Dwellers. The bylaws limit us to two one-year terms, and I am approaching the end of my second year. I think it's fair to say that the past two years have been quite challenging for just about everyone, myself included. I'm not sure how I would describe the experience of leading (or trying to lead) this organization, but I will say it's not for the faint of heart.

I began my first term with a sense of optimism about a practical end to the COVID pandemic. What followed was a period when it continued to impact severely just about everything THD did. We are still holding most social and program events outside, and our Board of Directors is still meeting via Zoom.

Looking back, I can think of what went well these past two years. We began having monthly happy hours, which have generally been well-attended and have provided a lot of opportunity for members to get to know each other. Especially during the early part of the pandemic, people were feeling isolated, and these gatherings have been helpful for many of us to get out and socialize.

Suddenly, it seemed like everybody had Zoom, and we took advantage of that by holding several successful online events. Among other programs, prior to the election we held online debates among candidates to be our representatives to the California State Assembly and the San Francisco Board of Supervisors. We hosted an online discussion between then-District Attorney Chesa Boudin and Chief Bill Scott of the San Francisco Police Department. We had conversations with Tom Ammann, Supervisor Aaron Peskin, and David Talbot.

I can also think of what didn't go so well. An organization like THD is only as strong as its members choose to make it. Unfortunately, we have had a very difficult time filling seats on the Board of Directors and our committees with committed volunteers. We have spent most of this year without a Social Chair, and as of this writing, we still don't have one. Combined with the effects of the pandemic, this vacancy had a very neg-

ative impact on our ability to hold social events, despite an avalanche of great ideas for what we could do.

During my two years as president, we lost our vice president and social chair, both of whom moved out of THD's boundaries. One board member resigned, and, sadly, we also lost our Historian, Termeh Yeghiazarian, to cancer. Filling these vacancies has been difficult, despite multiple efforts to recruit people.

As we embark on a new year, I can see several issues that will be facing the next president. Recently, our neighborhood has undergone some drastic changes, and it faces plenty more in the future.

Most obviously, the presence of Shared Spaces, colloquially known as "parklets," has dramatically altered the business core of North Beach at an unprecedented scale and with rather mixed results. When done right, these spaces can enhance the already-European feel of our sidewalks. But too often, they create darkness and induce feelings of claustrophobia. Constructed of cheap plywood and plastic, they are frequently graffiti magnets. Often public spaces have turned into private storage units, with ugly piles of chairs and patio heaters chained together. Recently, we've seen that the City has started to enforce its policies regarding Shared Spaces, certain to be an ongoing and frequently public process. THD will play a critical role in advocating for the livability and beauty of our neighborhood.

Over the past few years, developers have succeeded in moving much of the battle over the future of San Francisco's neighborhoods to Sacramento. Led by Senator Scott Wiener, our state-level representatives have been working diligently against self-determination and democracy. Again and again, they pass state laws to take our city's evolution out of the hands of those of us who live here. By way of the State Density Bonus, the Housing Element, Regional Housing Needs Allocation, and whatever new laws are in store for us, our state's legislative branch has been eager to do what it can to enable profits for developers, however much that might damage neighborhoods such as our own.

Not to be outdone by the state in selling out, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors passed the Home-SF program, which is a local version of the State Density Bonus. So now we must contend with the building pro-

posal at 955 Sansome Street. As if that weren't enough, we are also faced with a monstrous design for the Buon Gusto Sausage Factory Building, 535 Green Street, itself a product of the State Density Bonus.

These projects have the ability not only to degrade seriously the quality of life in our neighborhood but also to set precedents for even more irresponsible development. We are at a point where it may become the norm for the heart and soul of the City to be controlled by distant politicians who clearly do not have San Francisco's best interests at heart.

As I raise my hand to wave a final goodbye, I'd like to make one last appeal for your help. North Beach and Telegraph Hill, and, indeed, the entire City of San Francisco, are at a turning point. We are in the middle of a health crisis that often seems to have no end in sight. A serious lack of affordable housing has been seized by opportunists to promote a profit-driven political agenda. The administration and critical City agencies, such as Planning and San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency, seem to operate under the control of well-funded special interests.

Our only hope of saving our community from outside forces of greed and corruption is to get involved and stay involved. Being active in THD is one of the best ways to do so. Please, help out with a committee. When you get the email announcing the formation of the Nominating Committee, offer yourself as a candidate for the Board of Directors. We need you. North Beach needs you. Telegraph Hill needs you.





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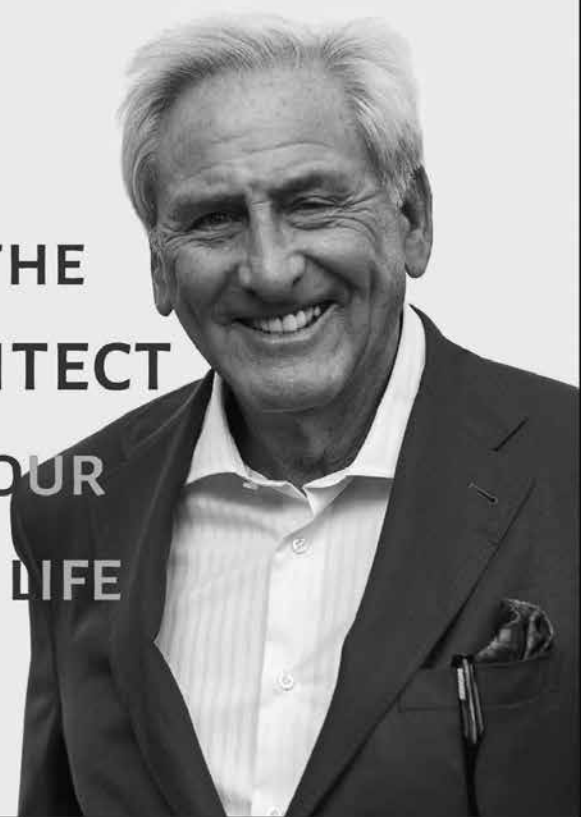
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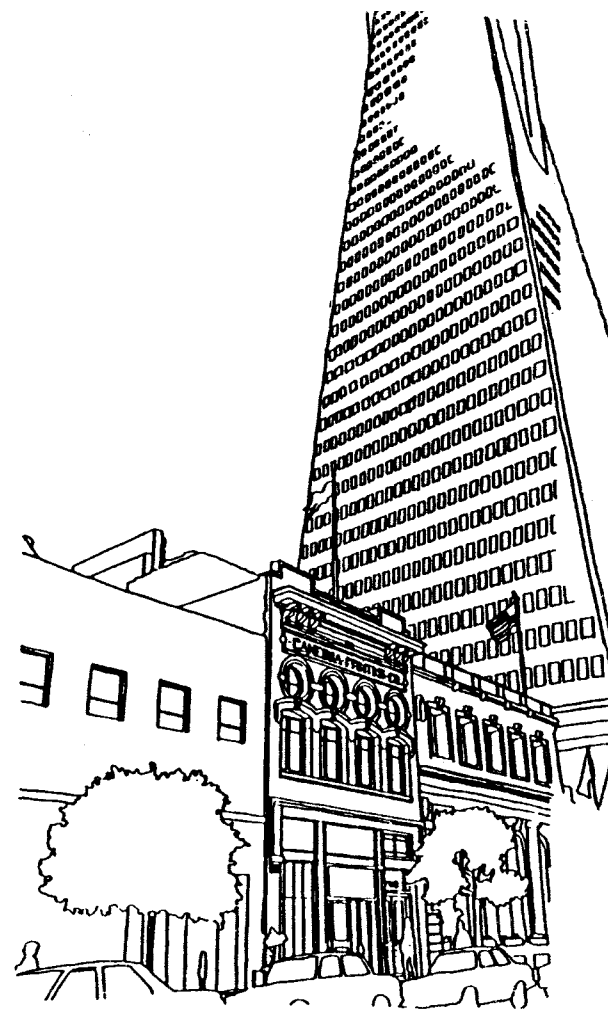
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THANKS FOR THE MOMORIES: RIP MOMO

by Romalyn Schmaltz

If you've ever left North Beach—maybe you've returned, or maybe you're still out there elsewhere like me, now—you know the feeling of longing to be back on the Hill. This is especially true when a dear friend and former neighbor passes on.

I was heartbreakingly far from Da Beach when I found out that one of our most bemusing, befuddling, and beloved sons had shuffled off, mortal coil and all. Richard Anderson—also known as “Little Dicky” but most widely known by the moniker he gave himself, “Momo”—had moved on to that great recyclable canvas in the sky. Or wherever.

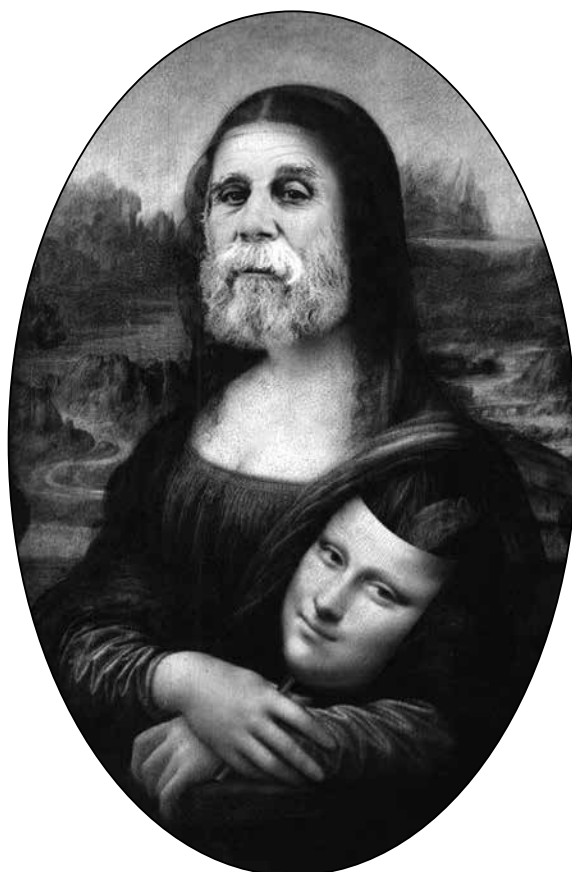
Basically known as our “Outsider Artist,” Momo was a complicated and indelible part of, as we say, the fiber and fabric of North Beach, Telegraph Hill, and our surrounding community. His memory is now emblazoned on the gallery walls of North Beach's heart alongside such recently departed stalwarts as Papa Gianni, Jack Hirschman, Ronald Sauer, Paul Kantner, Specs Simmons, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Pauly Grady, Captain Cool, Roy Mottini, DeForrest Wiggins... Frankly, the list of loss has become too long, this tally of neighborhood artists and eccentrics who have died since I began writing memorials (in 2016)—and that list is just some of the men who all tended to congregate on the corner of Vallejo and Grant, opining and bickering and out-doing each other's jokes. There's a sense of generational passage in all this, one that already has definitely changed the landscape of our village. Life, of course, will go on, but how do you replace so many legacies in a handful of years?

The answer, of course, is that you don't. You don't because you can't. So it goes.

Momo passed away on November 20 or 21, 2022 in his tiny SRO in the Tower Hotel, at the age of 74, surrounded by his artwork, with his usual morning crew at the Caffè Trieste wondering where he was. In his later years, due to chronic emphysema and serious mobility issues, his world became increasingly small, but he still showed up to the Trieste every morning and continued to create and exhibit his work until the end.

Born Richard Brien Anderson on June 17, 1948, Momo got his start in Cranford, New Jersey, making his way to San Francisco by way of Boston and Oregon. Through our conversations over the years, I learned very little about his distant past except that he immediately identified with North Beach, our artists and weirdos, while also starting a family, including three daughters. I was able to meet Peggy Anderson at an exhibition of his in 2018, but, sadly, his daughter Erica Johnson passed away two years ago. He is also survived by his daughter Caitlin Anderson and five grandchildren.

Momo really loved children. When I first met



Momo Lisa
FROM HIS FACEBOOK PAGE



Romalyn Schmaltz and Momo.

© NICLAS ULLSTRÖM

him, this surprised me—or at least, it surprised me that children loved Momo. He was always scruffy (although he'd often clean up pretty well for art events), his clothes were worn and covered with paint, he smoked and sported facial hair that ran the spectrum from Grandpa Joe to Father Time—in short, an odd Santa Claus for kids to gravitate toward. But his child-like-yet-avuncular, jovial energy attracted the little ones of the neighborhood like pigeons to a pastry.

In fact, Momo taught preschool in the 1980s in the Haight, which was where his art career itself was born: making pictures with his students. I wouldn't be sur-

prised if his kids—along with Momo's vast knowledge of continental literature and philosophy, his perspective on politics and penchant for gallows humor—weren't the biggest influences on his style. Simple is too simple a word, and juvenile ignores the trenchant savvy within his work. He had no use for color palettes nor necessity for traditional materials. There was a lot of latex and a lot of cardboard and a long period where he'd leave paintings—now quite valuable—on the streets and in alleys as kind-of Art Brut lean-tos.

“My manager has told me to knock it off,” he once told me around 2012, “but I can't help it. Galleries are one thing, but you've gotta get your work out there in different ways. My way is the free way.”

His art had a *sprezzatura* that strangely complemented that of Lawrence Ferlinghetti's, with whom he shared many a gallery wall over the years. Ferlinghetti was also his personal friend, and the vast difference in their personalities (Ferlinghetti being notoriously soft-spoken, with Momo being his jocular foil—but they both had their wry smiles) was itself a kind of work of art. These differences were belied by what they shared: in art, the distortion of primitive figures juxtaposed with sometimes-profane, usually-hilarious blurbs that verged on but never reached straight-up invective, rather reaching into the depths of unconventional wisdom. Lawrence had “Fuck Art, Let's Dance,” while Momo had “Never Trust a Skinny Dog.”

I asked a few neighborhood friends who knew him well for anecdotes that described what might be surprising things about his character. (There was a far-longer eulogy written for Momo by Phil Lumsden, who performed it at the North Beach First Fridays poetry reading in December.)

“My very favorite of all my Momo stories,” recalled one friend, “was when a bunch of us organized against the closure of Vallejo Street for the so-called ‘Poet's Piazza’ and presented our case against the project. There were almost 100 public comments just for that case, and people on both sides were impassioned and often long-winded. The developer we were opposing had stacked the courtroom with random construction workers who didn't know much about the project, and it was clear they were just installed there to take up seats. So in walks Momo, who goes up to the podium and points to the courtroom gallery, saying, ‘What are all these guys doing here? They're taking naps!’ Momo won the pennant that day, exposing the sham in a way no one else dared. Oh, and we won.”

Another amusing anecdote came from longtime friend Niclas Ullström, who remembers a photo shoot he did of Momo for his 72nd birthday. “So we go into Fresno Alley, and he takes his shirt off, and I start snapping away. He's doing all these poses, and we printed half a dozen hard copies as postcards. He said he'd send them to a couple of exes with the accompanying text: *Looking pretty good at 72, huh? See what you're missing out on?*”

We are indeed missing out on a lot: a real human's humanity helped us consider our own, which is the best you can ask of an artist. In the words of Hamlet as he holds out the skull of his favorite court jester Yorick—referring to the evanescence that is capital-L Life—“Alas, Poor Yorick... a fellow of infinite jest!”



Momo, Aaron Peskin, Niclas Ullström, and Phil Lumsden.

© ROMALYN SCHMALTZ



Momo amid a collection of his art.

FROM HIS FACEBOOK PAGE



DISTRICT 3 SUPERVISOR'S REPORT

by Supervisor Aaron Peskin
aaron.peskin@sfgov.org

I hope you found moments of togetherness, rest, and joy during the holiday break—airline meltdowns, flu strains, and atmospheric rivers notwithstanding! It's certainly been a time for our District 3 team to pause and reflect on the past year's work. We're grateful for this community because none of that would have been possible without your support and advocacy. Read on for some highlights from the past year.

Upside to Non-Stop Elections: Good Government Ballot Victories

An unprecedented number of elections in 2022, although exhausting, did come with their upsides. In June, I authored the ballot's top vote-getting measures, Propositions E and F. Prop E reformed the City's pay-to-play culture that was previously unchecked among San Francisco Department heads in the wake of a string of corruption scandals. Proposition F finally institutionalized a system for accountability and oversight over San Francisco's waste management rate-setting process, in the wake of revelations that the Recology monopoly had been bilking rate payers for millions of dollars in overcharges.

In November, I offered Proposition B, my effort to fix former Supervisor Matt Haney's well-intentioned but flawed 2020 measure to split the Department of Public Works, the City Controller having found that it created more costly bureaucracy. Luckily, voters saw fit to adopt our measure maximizing Public Works resources for street cleaning and services while still maintaining department oversight and transparency.

Voters also approved a renewal of our badly-needed sales tax for transportation and voted down an ill-conceived and premature City College parcel tax renewal. Perhaps the biggest elections victory of all happened off the ballot: When the Elections Commission voted in a surprise move to oust our esteemed Elections Director, John Arntz, without cause, the Board of Supervisors unanimously approved my resolution denying their request for additional funding in support of their move.

After widespread public outcry, the Elections Commission reversed course and ultimately renewed John Arntz's contract in a victory for democratic and transparent government. Director Arntz is one of the City's top-performing department heads, who has served us well during a global pandemic and several back-to-back special elections, and I'm delighted to see him continue his work.

Tenant & Affordable Housing Protections

2022 was the year the City adopted my "Tenant Right to Organize" legislation, allowing apartment residents to organize a quasi-bargaining unit in the interest of securing better living conditions and facilitating good faith lease negotiations with large corporate real estate landlords. We also passed my "Fire Safety and Sprinkler Requirements for High-Rise Buildings" legislation, after a fire at the Golden Gateway Apartments revealed that there were a host of large older apartment buildings downtown that did not have adequate sprinkler systems (grandfathered in our fire safety codes).

We also secured significant investments in the budget process to rehab our aging SRO residential

hotels, including installing elevators for seniors and the disabled, and abating asbestos. We fought alongside our neighbors in Chinatown against speculative exploitation and eviction attempts, and celebrated their recent victory against Valstock Apartments in a landmark settlement. We also piloted a new "Sustainable & Affordable Laundromat program" for neighborhoods dependent on this community service.

Finally, the failure of November's Proposition E, authored by real estate developers, reaffirmed that voters don't want to solve our affordability crisis on the backs of our most vulnerable residents who already struggle to income qualify for the City's below-market-rate units. Similarly, the overwhelming passage of Proposition M's residential vacancy tax showed that voters understand that the lack of market-rate housing is not the problem but rather a lack of affordable price-controlled units.

Small Business Love & Downtown Recovery

One of the best highlights of 2022 was the successful return of Noodlefest, uniting North Beach and Chinatown in culinary and cultural celebration! Our office has been very busy working with the North Beach Business Association to recruit new small businesses to the neighborhood and help them open as quickly as possible. Grant and Columbus Avenues have continued to be bustling centers of San Francisco tourism and nightlife, with Club Fugazi adding new shows and live music and performance venues like Keys Jazz Bistro and the Lost Church opening to showcase local independent talent. We had long searched for a tenant for 580 Green Street and were delighted to work with Luke's Local to sign a lease for a full-service grocery at this critical intersection. The North Beach neighborhood is experiencing an all-time high occupancy rate, an impressive feat coming out of the pandemic. We even broke ground on a rehab of the Transamerica Pyramid, Downtown's gateway to North Beach!

My office also led the City process to create a permanent Shared Spaces parklet program after piloting a temporary program in North Beach at the outset of the pandemic. When the Mayor's Office began issuing fines in advance of parklet operators' transition to the new program, we intervened and extended the exemption period another year. We renewed the Legacy Business Fund and doubled the number of District 3 Legacy Businesses district-wide. Check out House of Nanking's profile on the Food Network, streaming on Discovery+!

Last year I also worked closely with tourism industry stakeholders and our City Controller and City Administrator to expand the Tourism Improvement District in our ongoing efforts to attract national tourism back to San Francisco. I've also been meeting regularly with the Union Square Alliance, Downtown Community Benefit District, and other downtown stakeholders to develop action items for near- and long-term economic renewal downtown, including mixed-concepts. Finally, our office is excited to support a vision for tourism areas in San Francisco that encourages and incentivizes local BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) and women-owned businesses. We hope to have some exciting announcements on that front soon!

Cultural Preservation

The Historic Preservation Commission finally weighed in on a North Beach Historic District Context Statement that would celebrate the myriad contributions of everyone from our Italian immigrants to the Beat Generation artists to organized labor and some of the first queer community spaces in the City. It's moving forward, and we're excited to support its adoption. We also secured funding from the state budget for culturally competent new art, lighting, and disaster response infrastructure at Portsmouth Square—special thanks to THD's support for the Portsmouth Square Master Plan and clubhouse expansion. Your solidarity with Chinatown was deeply appreciated.

We partnered twice with the steadfast crew at the San Francisco Italian Athletic Club and Salesian Boys' & Girls' Club to paint the entirety of North Beach's utility poles with Italian flags to welcome back the longest-running Italian Heritage Parade in the U.S. We're also making progress in partnership with Supervisor Catherine Stefani in District 2 in securing critical federal funding to renovate the debilitated historic Muni pier, which protects Aquatic Park. Finally, we're looking forward to celebrating some exciting new activation in Jackson Square this year, as well, so stay tuned!

Transportation and Pedestrian & Bike Safety

It was a long time coming, but we finally celebrated the grand opening of the Central Subway, with T-line service connecting South of Market to Chinatown and North Beach. We completed Vision Zero quick-build projects in the Barbary Coast and Downtown neighborhoods and along the Embarcadero, funded by our 2019 Proposition D measure. We also completed the implementation of the final Kearny Street Safety Improvements, led by Chinatown stakeholders, which include full pedestrian scrambles at Jackson and Washington Streets on Kearny and new traffic mitigation around Portsmouth Square.

New Faces & Farewells

We bid our longtime legislative aide Lee Hepner "ciao for now" and welcomed Russian Hill resident and former small business owner Melody Hsu to our team. We also sadly said goodbye to some truly beloved friends and neighbors here in North Beach and Telegraph Hill, including artist philosopher Momo, intellectual and activist Tony Ryan, and artist Termeh Yeghiazarian.

Thank you for an incredible year. 2023 is going to be one of growth and change, and my team and I are ready to make that happen with your help!

See you in the neighborhood,
Aaron



Editor's Note: Congratulations to our Supervisor, Aaron Peskin, newly elected to a third term as President of the Board of Supervisors. Supervisor Peskin has been a leader in the City's response to the pandemic and a champion of the diverse communities he represents. We, in District 3, are so fortunate to have him as our supervisor. The Semaphore salutes him!

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FROM THE EDITOR

by Cap Caplan
Semaphore@thd.org

Though there are still vacant storefronts, sometimes several on one block, a number are already opening their doors to new ventures. Almost every day someone tells me about dining at a new restaurant. Or, on a walk, I spot a new business. Even on my block, the former Tante Marie Cooking School, shuttered for a long while, has news about a new occupant reopening the spot.

We're certain you, our readers, share in this exciting revitalization of our neighborhood. So, in this issue and the next, we focus on some enticing developments.

In this issue, you'll find:

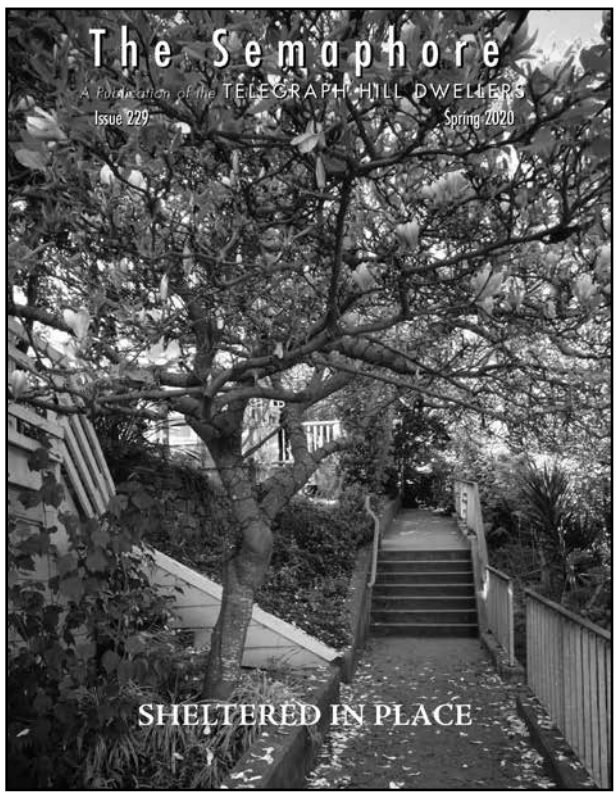
- the reopening of Savoy Tivoli, a North Beach icon
- news of Cassava, where THD and Russian Hill Neighbors co-hosted a well-attended happy hour
- an in-depth review of Elena, a Mediterranean restaurant opened by a familiar North Beach businessperson
- From Art & Culture, Keys Jazz Bistro, and plans for a "Neighbors Night Out"
- Neighborhood History Tours, a new THD endeavor, featuring noted author and historian Gary Kamiya.

And there's more to see in our upcoming Spring issue, starting with an introduction to Luke's Local, a neighborhood grocery arriving at 580 Green Street.

As we readied this first issue of 2023, with its myriad activities, I couldn't help but reflect upon how far we've come.

Spring 2020's *Semaphore*, "Sheltered in Place," featured a cover photo of a gorgeous walkway in full spring bloom but with nary a person in sight. Where were the people who should be traversing up and down the stairs? Clues abounded through the issue's pages, a Transportation Report noting the shutdown of 71 bus routes due to an 85% drop in ridership, workers staying home, with BART and Caltrain suffering similar fates.

One had to wonder what, if anything, might survive. Bars, restaurants, and just about everything else in this people-oriented community were suddenly empty and dark. Nothing was safe. We almost lost even City Lights Bookstore, which would have been a tragedy on so many levels. The business was saved only through a wildly successful online plea for financial help.

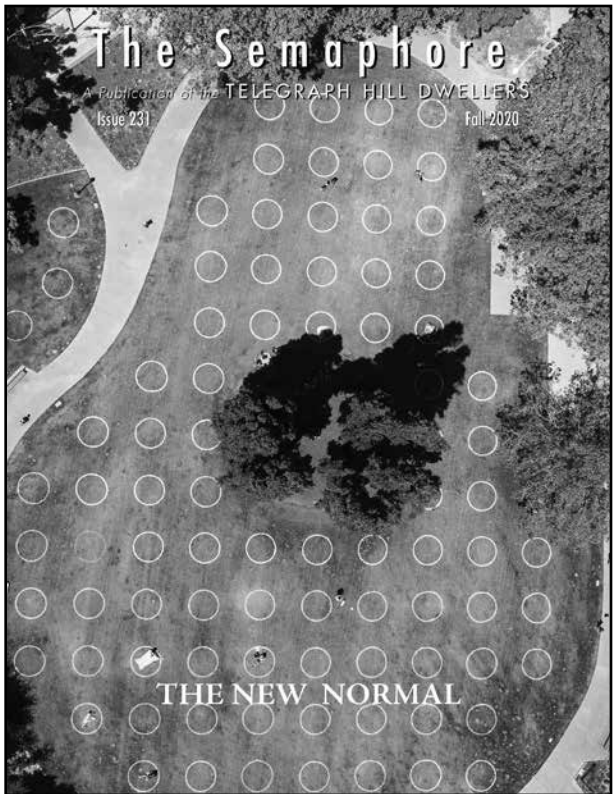


Fall 2020's *Semaphore* brought "The New Normal," a startling cover of white circles repeating across the page. Perusing the issue, one sees a photo of Washington Square Park, those strange circles on the lawn, almost like some alien landing diagram. No, those chalked markings offered spaces for people to gather but with strict guidelines to lower exposure by keeping strangers apart. In that issue, there were additional photos of people gathering outside restaurants

NORTH BEACH IS ALIVE!

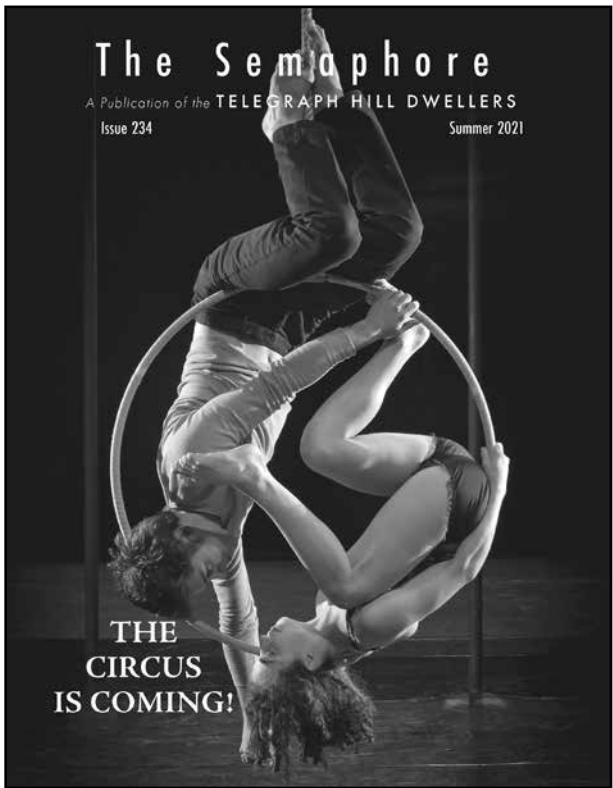
and bars to be safe with "social distancing," a favorite new vocabulary word.

Those were the first inklings, it would turn out, of progress, if not that of a diminishing threat, with adaptations to it.

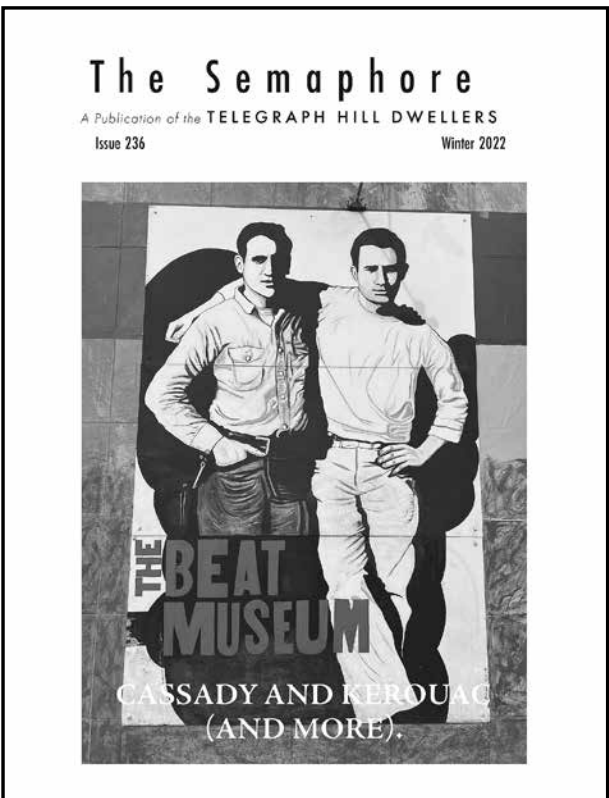


Vaccine immunizations—the radical turn of events at 2021's start—brought a glimmer of hope and a beginning sense of relief with *Semaphores* noting some headway. Through photos and articles, one learned about "Shared Spaces," the City's program of allowing outdoor dining to help curb transmission and save businesses. And, with regular Supervisor's Reports, we were kept informed about a host of other City initiatives addressing various aspects of the crisis.

The first hint of a true renaissance came surprisingly early, its importance perhaps not fully recognized at the time. Summer 2021's cover, "The Circus is Coming," celebrates the arrival of The 7 Fingers circus troupe, reviving Club Fugazi. What a vote of confidence in North Beach, this move coming in the throes of the pandemic! And what a boost. Opening night was nothing short of an act of collective defiance, of pure joy and optimism. Many in attendance, despite the fully masked audience and vaccination checks at the door, must have had their concerns. I certainly did. But Judy Irving and I would not have been anywhere else that night, our eyes glued to the acrobats and aerialists flying across the stage.

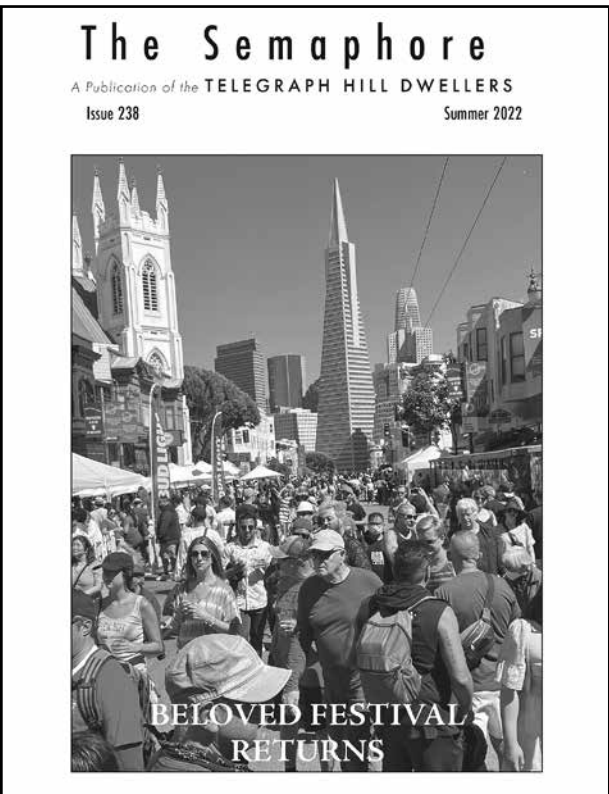


Six months later, Winter 2022's "Beat Museum" featured the museum's reopening some months before and plans for an ambitious Kerouac centennial celebration. This was followed by Spring 2022 "New Growth" with news of the opening of a plant store and then in Summer 2022's "Beloved Festival," coverage of a returning neighborhood festival (and two more mentioned in



other articles).

The latest developments, covered in this issue, are especially welcoming. They stand as a harbinger of a recovering social scene, confirming what one sees and senses on the street. Dining, wining, enjoying jazz, mixing it up with your neighbors. We hope you will support these new and returning businesses and programs. Show them how much we want them to stay.



So, readers, tell us—what have you seen and heard? Have you visited a new or reemerging business? Dined at a new restaurant deserving a shoutout? We want to know. What we'd really like to know is if you'd care to put your thoughts on paper, as we are looking for writers right now. Help us chronicle this resilient and special community.

Write to us at semaphore@thd.org.



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GREETING ELENA MEDITERRANEAN

by Joe Bonadio
(reprinted with permission from Joe Bonadio at JoeContent.net)

As North Beach cruises through the end of another Indian Summer, it's hard not to feel grateful to be here. We've experienced a return to form in recent days, with a flurry of new restaurant and bar openings that shows no sign of abating. In a testament to the city's taste, San Francisco has returned to North Beach, and suddenly our little neighborhood is back on the map.

Amid all the activity, last month Nader Parhizgari quietly opened what might be the best new Mediterranean restaurant in the city. Taking over the former space of *Franchino* on Columbus Avenue, *Elena Mediterranean* is Nader's first restaurant. But it's not his first business in North Beach, not by a longshot. Nader is a well-known face in the neighborhood, having owned *Nature Stop*, the indispensable Grant Avenue grocery, for 13 years.

I was curious about that. Why would someone who ran a grocery store for well over a decade suddenly decide to open a restaurant? Last week I sat down with Nader to find out more. Edited for length and clarity, our conversation is below.

Joe Bonadio: So Nader, you are anything but a newcomer here in North Beach. How long have you been here?

Nader Parhizgari: The first time I moved to North Beach was in 2005. I bought *Nature Stop* in 2006, and I had it until 2019.

JB: So you're getting ready for a serious pivot. Tell us about your new project.

NP: In the 30 years I've been in San Francisco, 20 of them in North Beach, I've always wanted to do something different. Something for the people of this neighborhood, something that's healthier. Not pizza, not pasta.

So that's what I've been working on for the past couple of years: bringing something new to the people of North Beach.

JB: Do you have any experience in the restaurant business?

NP: Yes. Back in 2004 I established the menu for both Skyline College and San Mateo College. I also



The Colossal, a red blend from Portugal, is elegant and fruit forward. © JOE BONADIO

worked in student food services at the Berkeley campus



Nader on the opening night of Elena with Chef Adolfo. © JOE BONADIO



Supervisor Aaron Peskin and his wife Nancy Shanahan enjoy an early dinner at North Beach's brand-new Elena. © NADER PARHIZGARI

for a while.

JB: You made a lot of connections in the neighborhood at *Nature Stop*. What's it like to be coming back and starting something new, just a couple of blocks away?

NP: Since I live in North Beach, I'm excited. I know a lot of people here, and hopefully they are excited too.

JB: Tell me about Elena.

NP: *Elena* is a healthy Mediterranean style that draws from Spain, Greece, Turkey...all of the best of the region. We started out with a limited menu, five or six items, and we'll add to that as time passes.

JB: What should we expect to see on the menu?

NP: Well, we cook with local and organic vegetables whenever possible, and only the best halal meats. We've got a beautiful rack of lamb and a lamb shank,



The fresh baklava, served with a delicate date syrup. © JOE BONADIO

and a few fresh seafood choices, all served with either couscous or farro.

JB: It all sounds great. Another thing that you were known for at *Nature Stop* was your ability to source extremely nice wines.

NP: Yes! I put that experience to work here. Our wine list is really special. 85 percent of the wines are from small wineries, a lot of it organic. In keeping with our goal of serving healthy cuisine, we're trying to offer as much organic, biodynamic wine as we can.

I'm really excited about *Elena*. We've got something good and unique in the neighborhood, and I can't wait to share it with everyone. ✂

Elena is now open Tuesday through Sunday from 5:00 PM until 10:00 PM.

Elena
347 Columbus Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94133
(415) 757-0059 • elenamediterranean.com



The restaurant is a Parhizgari family affair, including Nader, Mandana and their daughter Elena, the restaurant's namesake. © DAVID LIPKIN



Mandana Parhizgari welcoming new customer. © DAVID LIPKIN

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Issue #240 • Winter 2023



WATERFRONT REPORT

by Greg Chiampou, Committee Chair
greg.chiampou@thd.org

Relocate the Ferry Building? Shrink the Embarcadero roadway? Accept that our historic piers might be allowed to drown?

The Port of San Francisco is asking that we expediently digest and accept some heady and permanent reconfigurations of the Embarcadero waterfront to manage coastal flood risks. The Port envisions, depending on the choices made, what might be an almost unrecognizable or at least a much-changed Embarcadero waterfront by 2030—whether due to actual coastal flooding, seismic damages, or proposed measures to protect it.

The Port’s recently released draft plan, “Waterfront Adaptations Strategies” (<https://sfport.com/wrp/waterfront-adaptation>), is the result of its work with six San Francisco agencies, 17 state agencies, and the federal government over the past five years to address flood risks on the Bay waterfront due to rising sea levels. The preliminary plan proposes seven alternatives, separate strategies that contain some very bold permanent measures for mitigating these flood risks and damages along the Embarcadero. Included are transformative actions such as substantially moving back the entire shoreline and relocating the Ferry Building. Heady measures, for sure!

The Port’s draft plan is wide-ranging yet seems short on practicality in many places. It also gives insufficient weight to an incremental approach to flood risk management. And the local community has posed lots of unanswered questions about costs/benefits and possibly unintended outcomes.

The response strategies address the forecasted risk of sea levels rising seven feet along San Francisco’s 7.5-mile Bay coastline.

THD members recently attended several of the Port’s presentations of the plan, including a walking tour along the Embarcadero. These provided additional information and expanded on the “Waterfront Adaptations Strategies” plan, including the possibi-

ty of relocating the Ferry Building.

At community presentations, the Port breezed over a lot of need-to-know questions from the audiences, questions like “Can you address how this particular strategy(s) could actually, realistically be implemented?” or “Any estimates on how many billions of dollars each of these alternative strategies might cost?” or “Where would the Ferry Building be expected to go?” Others: “How will the historic piers and bulkheads be maintained and preserved?” And another important one: “How might our neighborhood function while the northeast waterfront is being redesigned?”

Attendees told the Port’s Adaptations team that its proposals should acknowledge impacts on the whole city, not just the waterfront, as well as provide reasonable estimates of the proposals’ cost assumptions. As an example, they said that the Port’s proposals should recognize that the entire City’s transportation and emergency services networks would be impacted by some of these alternatives, and not just during a flood but because of the Port’s own proposed remediations. It also seems unrealistic to expect that residents can thoughtfully and prudently compare the Port’s seven alternative strategies when there is no discussion of costs/benefits or funding for any of them.

Those in the audience recognized that the presentation did not leave a lot of room for incrementalism. You don’t have to be a climate change doubter to advocate for a more gradual, tactical approach to protecting our waterfront from floods and seismic risks. And everyone can appreciate that large, permanent remediations, such as moving an entire city block, still might not achieve its aims. Let’s see strategies with the flexibility to respond to both emerging flood developments and any remediation failures nimbly, tactically.

While short on practicality, the main purpose of the Plan might be to “move the goalposts” under discussion. Sea level rise forecasts vary for the Bay’s coast: The Port is using projections of 1.5 feet, 3.5 feet (advocated by the Army Corp. of Engineers), and 7 feet (advocated by California state and Bay Area officials). The Port’s

NOW YOU SEE IT, NOW YOU DON’T

Strategy G Flood Defenses in 2040

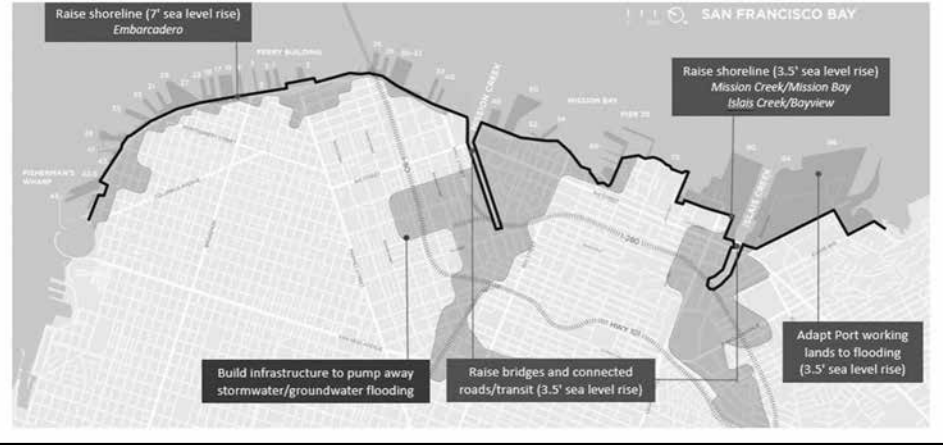


Illustration of one of the seven alternative “Waterfront Adaptations Strategies.”

COURTESY PORT OF SAN FRANCISCO

plan alternatives are primarily designed to meet the 3.5 feet and 7 feet projections. These high-scale remedies remind me of the developer whose opening gambit is to start with a sky-high proposal in the hopes of eventually settling somewhere better. As opposed to practicality, the Plan’s primary intention might just be to galvanize public attention and expand our acceptance of what’s both possible and needed. That’s an understandable objective, given the projected enormity of coastal flood risk combined with seismic risks.

The Plan’s “Do Nothing” base case projects a substantially destroyed Embarcadero wharf by 2030. The Port’s other six scenarios incorporate varying levels of remediation against flood risks, ranging from minimal intervention, letting nature takes its course, and maybe pulling back the shoreline (a “Retreat” approach to flood risk), to the “Defend” stance, erecting taller sea walls and other physical/mechanical barriers to keep the water out, or “Accommodate” by lifting or relocating buildings, wharves, or roads and installing industrial pumps. The Port thinks a hybrid of these three adaptation approaches is most likely to be adopted.

If the Port’s primary intent is to stimulate civic engagement and expand the local imagination of what might be both needed and achievable, then the Plan needs to do a better job of addressing outcomes and how these recommended alternatives might protect and enhance our environment rather than just batten down the hatches.

The tradeoffs are not clear. Here are a few big and smaller examples in my review of the Port’s draft alternatives for the northeast waterfront.

Narrow the Embarcadero roadway: What might that imply for future North Beach (and city-wide) traffic congestion?

Pull back the Embarcadero shoreline: What about repercussions for the nearby businesses, residences, parks, and skyscrapers?

Targeted landfills around the Wharf: one of the Plan’s many not-sufficiently-clear recommendations, especially if you boat or swim there.

Moreover, the draft Plan pays scant attention to The Port of San Francisco Embarcadero Historic District’s significance, which contains 28 buildings and 19 contributing structures located from Pier 45 through Pier 48. The Plan implies, however, that piers might be sacrificed to rising sea levels.

Granted, this is a first draft—one with the herculean task of incorporating forecasts, projections, and numerous variables from multiple sources to brainstorm creative solutions for our waterfront’s flood (and seismic) risks. Yet the Port also anticipates having its final recommendation in summer 2023. We are asked, as I noted at the start, to digest, decide, and accept (and ultimately fund) transformative, permanent redesigns of the Embarcadero waterfront in an expedient timeframe.

Let’s see the Port next present Embarcadero waterfront alternatives that are practical, tactical, as well as more responsive to the waterfront community that expects to continue living here. And, before asking the public to weigh in on which alternatives are best, the Port needs to provide cost/benefit analysis, funding, and other decision-making information so that the community can better judge and compare alternatives. We deserve and need better, more complete, and more timely information.



Waterfront south of Ferry Building.

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REBIRTH OF THE STC

by Nadya Williams

Just as the Phoenix, the symbol of San Francisco, had risen from ashes to rebuild beyond its former glory, so has the legendary Savoy Tivoli bar on upper Grant Avenue been rejuvenated to add new life to the vibrant entertainment hub that is North Beach.

History of The Savoy

Only three families have owned the Savoy Tivoli since its inception more than a century ago. Controversy reigns over the history of the building—mainly when it was constructed and even if it survived the 1906 conflagration! The awning in front reads, “since 1907.” A recent article in the *San Francisco Standard* states, “... opened shortly after the 1906 earthquake,” while a current Tivoli press release claims that it was built in 1906, being “one of the few to survive the Great Quake.” However, a Telegraph Hill Dwellers’ search of City records places the building permit date firmly in 1913—complete with blueprints.

No matter, everyone agrees that the Finocchio family opened the New Tivoli, as it was originally named, at 1434 Grant Avenue as an Italian restaurant on the street level and a boarding house/hotel in the two stories above to serve mainly newly arriving immigrants from the Old Country. The restaurant served traditional, seven-course Italian meals, and the back section, in the spacious middle of the block, had three bocce courts. And, apparently, a “black sheep” of the Finocchio clan (who would be Joe) opened the famed drag club on Broadway. Many an elder member of the North Beach Italian community has fond memories of those decades.

A big change happened in 1967 when Nick Finocchio sold the establishment to Freddie Kuh, a much-revered self-described “Bohemian businessman” who also owned the famous Spaghetti Factory. (The 1997 *Chronicle* obit on him is well worth the read!)

Outside culture and lifestyles suddenly flooded into the largely insular Italian community! Under Kuh, the name became The Savoy Tivoli and bocce playing was gone, with one court showing experimental films and the remaining two for theatre and live music.

In 1974, *Beach Blanket Babylon* appeared but soon moved to Club Fugazi. In 1976, the beginning of San Francisco’s Punk Scene arrived with the Ramones playing to wild crowds, followed by luminaries such as Jefferson Airplane, Jimmy Reed, Robert Palmer, Sheila E, Queen Ida and the Bon Temps, Country Joe McDonald, and Richard Thompson, among many others. Quieter programs prevailed as well, the venue being part of the “Beat” poetry scene and frequented by artists and writers, the famous and the-not-so.

Under Kuh’s liberal helm, the inattentive waitstaff was legendary. Here’s a snippet from a piece by P. Segal, *Bohemian Archivist*: “When they finally came, drinks were delivered by Howard, for example, a tall Black drag queen whose hair was three different colors each week. Typically, no one collected your check. You took it to Madame Nu, a short Asian drag queen, who sat in the concierge-like booth in the dining room. A joke that made its way around the terrace: ‘Savoy



Comedy and other live performances have returned.

© DAVID LIPKIN



Ready to serve old and new friends.

© DAVID LIPKIN

Tivoli: now offering same day service.’ On nights when the service was particularly bad, people would just go behind the bar, and get their own damn drink. The bartender, Franco, had one front tooth and the wisdom of Buddha. It was worth not getting another martini from our theoretical waitperson, just to collect a few seconds of grounding at the bar.”

Then in 1983, the third and current dynasty stepped in with Kuh selling to the Kozel clan. The restaurant closed. The large back building holding the former courts and entertainment venues was converted to a multi-sectioned office space, but the bar continued to thrive, with pool tables and a small dance floor. Mal Sharpe and his Big Money Band was a popular Saturday afternoon event, playing on the terrace by the open wall, with European tourists often dancing

on the sidewalk. However, noise-mitigating improvements were not installed, and tenants and neighbors alike were impacted—the open wall, if you like, being a precursor to the pandemic-caused “shared spaces” where music, TV sports, and merriment now spill onto the streets.

Contention raged in 2002 when noise complaints were filed with the City. Apparently, the open wall caused late-night sound to bounce off the opposite buildings on Grant, traveling up the hill even to Kearny Street residences. The bar shut down for two months, and some new insulation greatly improved matters. Then, in 2018, the City-mandated seismic retrofit requirement descended to shut down The Savoy, with the pandemic following closely behind.



Savoy Tivoli alive again.

© DENNIS HEARNE



Artistic touches adorn the walls.

© DENNIS HEARNE

DRIED SAVOY TIVOLI



Center bar near the performance space.

© DENNIS HEARNE

A Reopening

At the beginning of 2022, in stepped Miami-based businessman Paul Kozel, the remaining scion of the last owners, with the aim of reopening The Savoy Tivoli and restoring some of the live jazz and culture of North Beach on upper Grant.

Kozel has spent lavishly to renovate and beautify the venue, not only the bar but the building above, Tivoli Towers, with its 10 prized rental units. Kozel's mother, the late Agnes Claire Kozel, managed The Savoy and upstairs units, starting in the 1980s until her death in July 2020.

The substantial restoration work took many months and was organized by Kozel's friend and business partner, Tito Avila. Designer Craige Walters assiduously retained and enhanced the unique murals around the upper walls, the kitschy "palm trees" from the Kuh era, the jukebox, a church pew, and more than 20 hand-crafted art deco lamps that hang above a semi-private lounge area in the smaller room. There is a new stage for live music and, behind that, a green room/pool table room and a VIP lounge, all of them open by the time you read this. Much to the

delight of the upper-floor tenants, special soundproofing material has been applied to the ceilings.



Historic art deco lamps.

© DENNIS HEARNE

However, The Savoy has, once again, not been without controversy. The noise level of music is ex-

acerbated by a particular feature, an open wall onto the street that over the years has been both its boon and its bane. The bar actually has two sections: the original, smaller room, toward Green Street (south), is well enclosed, and the larger "patio" section toward Union Street (north), where a bar was added in the 1950s, has the open wall and now a small stage.

A soft opening began December 1. Two days later a local resident filed a noise complaint with Alcohol Beverage Control.

From The Savoy's Avila: "We're fine-tuning all our sound systems. That's what soft openings are for...to find out what you have to fix. The new team in the bar is going through growing pains, and we've already let go of staff for not following protocols."

He continued, "We're making every effort to reach out to neighbors and to keep the volume down. Live shows will end by 10 p.m., and the patio bar volume will be turned down by 11 p.m. Special sound-blocking curtains will go up along the open wall soon. In addition, sound-absorbing panels on the inside of the large awning over the patio room are to be reinstalled after cleaning. The original, smaller room on the south end presents no audio problems; with double-paned windows and an 'L' shaped entrance, minimal bar noise escapes."

Clearly, The Savoy holds great nostalgia for generations of patrons, and its Phoenix-like reincarnation is to be celebrated and enjoyed by seasoned old-timers and newcomers alike. The bar's management encourages the public to contact the establishment at TheSavoyTivoli@gmail.com.

One hopes that neighbors and tenants can find a balance and accommodation of their sometimes disparate needs.

There is no further information regarding the noise complaint at this time.

Details

The Savoy anticipates being open Wednesday – Friday, 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. and 5 p.m. to midnight; Saturday, 8 a.m. to 1 a.m.; and Sunday, 10 a.m. to 10 p.m.

Regular entertainment will include Classic Movie Night on Wednesdays, Comedy Thursdays, and Music on Fridays.

The Savoy will welcome back patrons for coffee on its beautiful patio in the mornings.

The bar menu will focus on craft cocktails.

While The Savoy itself does not have a kitchen and does not have a food menu, it works with various partners that provide catering for any occasion.

Nadya Williams has been a member of the THD board since 2021 and also happens to be a lucky 29-year resident of Tivoli Towers.



Grant Avenue vista from within.

© DAVID LIPKIN



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PLANNING &
ZONING
REPORT

by Stan Hayes, Nancy Shanahan,
and Mary Lipian, Committee Co-Chairs
PZ@thd.org

North Beach Historic Context Statement

Big news for all those of us—here, throughout the Bay Area, and across the world—who love and cherish North Beach as one of our most special places. At its December 7 meeting, the City’s Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) unanimously adopted the updated and expanded *North Beach Historic Context Statement*, which documents the cultural and architectural resources in North Beach. Building upon the original *North Beach Architectural and Cultural Survey* completed in 1982 and officially adopted by the Board of Supervisors in 1999, this document displays the extensive revisions and updating by professional architectural historians Michael Corbett, Katherine Petrin, and Shayne Watson.

As noted in THD’s letter of support to the HPC, the *North Beach Historic Context Statement* “documents in detail the amazingly rich history of North Beach, including its rapid reconstruction following the 1906 earthquake and fire, its place as an undisputed center of Italian life and culture in San Francisco, and its unequivocal connection to Bohemians and Beats and the earliest and most significant LGBTQ establishments.”

Adoption of the *North Beach Historic Context Statement* is critical to the protection of North Beach and the possible future designation of a North Beach Historic District. As stated by THD, “The beauty, livability, and international reputation of North Beach depends, in large part, on the preservation of its historic resources. Preservation, in turn, depends on public education and the availability to City planners, public officials, and residents alike, of solid, professionally conducted historical research as exemplified by the *North Beach Historic Context Statement*.”

Efforts to update and expand the 1982 context statement and survey were first led by THD under the sponsorship of San Francisco Architectural Heritage. Those efforts were later assumed by the Northeast San Francisco Conservancy (nesfc.org/portfolio-items/north-beach-survey/), which, through its fundraising efforts and oversight, has played a central role in this major, successful undertaking.

For more information and a glimpse into the rich history of North Beach as documented in the *North Beach Historic Context Statement*, we invite you to visit THD’s website at www.thd.org/hcs-intro to read a recently published article in *The Semaphore* and where you also can download the entire *Historic Context Statement* (thd.org/historic-context).

955 Sansome

As you might know from our recent P&Z Reports, developer Aralon is seeking City approval for a project that would demolish the existing three-story parking garage at the intersection of Sansome and Vallejo Streets, located within the Northeast Waterfront Historic District. The developer proposes to construct in its place a 10-story residential tower that has now grown to 65 units, 25% of which the developer says would be “affordable.” Rising nearly 120 feet above Sansome, the building would be multiple stories taller than any other building in the historic district, nearly three times taller than the average building in the historic district along Sansome, and three times taller than the 40-foot height limit of the California Register-eligible historic neighborhood uphill along Vallejo in the same block.

For the City to permit the project, the developer must obtain from the HPC approval of what’s called a “Certificate of Appropriateness” or COA. The Planning Department states that: “A Certificate of Appropriateness is required for any construction, addition, major alteration, relocation, removal, or dem-



Proposed building at 955 Sansome.

olition of a structure, object, or feature on a designated landmark district [in this case, the Northeast Waterfront Historic District], or a designated landmark interior.”

In August, the project was reviewed by the HPC’s Architectural Review Committee (ARC) to provide early direction, comments, and advice on the project. The consensus of the ARC was that the building was too large and needed to be reduced in size and scale. Contrary to the ARC’s consensus guidance and comments by neighbors and THD, the developer’s response was to revise the project plan to propose a building essentially unchanged in height and increased in number of units from 57 to 61, densities more than twice the maximum of the 24 units otherwise allowed under current zoning.

Central to the project is the developer’s request that the building be granted extra height and density under the City’s HOME-SF program. An organization of neighbors (the Waterfront Advisory Committee or WAC), supported by THD, challenged the project’s qualification for HOME-SF. At its core, the challenge centered on a code provision that to qualify for

continued on next page



Destination Outer Richmond restaurant Cassava relocates to its new North Beach home on October 12.

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NEIGHBORHOOD
ENGAGEMENT
REPORT

by Nick Ferris, Committee Chair
nick.ferris@thd.org

Everyone knows the Beatniks, but did you know the San Francisco Police Department had a Beatnik Patrol? Have you heard of the Co-Existence Bagel Shop? How about Father Oreste Trinchieri? Did you know Grant Avenue was formerly Dupont Street? If you answered no to any of these, I strongly recommend attending one of THD's Neighborhood History Tours.

On November 12, we held our first in the tour series with famed author and historian Gary Kamiya. Starting at Caffè Trieste, we scaled the streets and alleyways of Telegraph Hill while Gary regaled us with the history and evolution of the neighborhood, bringing to life stories of the families who lived on the hill generations ago, their daily happenings in buildings that still exist today. Such stories touch on marriages and murders of times past, Italian youth gangs stealing pies and causing trouble, Beat poet Bob Kaufman battling officers of the SFPD's Beatnik Patrol, and my personal favorite, the arrival of Father Oreste Trinchieri, founder of the Salesian Boys & Girls Club on Washington Square Park. 'Father Trink,' as he was affectionately known, arrived from Italy in 1897 to stabilize and bring structure to children's lives through organizing Scout troops, sports, and, above all, placing a focus on loving kindness towards children, which is continued to this day.

Planning & Zoning Report cont'd from previous page

HOME-SF, the developed area of the existing building must be less than 20% of the "principally permitted buildable gross floor area" of the site, a measure of the largest development that hypothetically could be approved under City code.

The City's Zoning Administrator (ZA) assumed in his calculation that the "principally permitted buildable gross floor area" for this site was defined by a hypothetical 11-story office building having eight-foot floors. With this critical assumption, the ZA determined that the HOME-SF percentage was 18.3%, below 20% and thus qualifying the project for HOME-SF. An analysis by WAC's well-known engineering expert Lawrence Karp concluded, however, that the ZA's assumed hypothetical building was unbuildable and thus could not be used to define principally permitted buildable gross floor area for the site.

For this and a variety of other reasons—see *thd.org/pz* if you're interested—supported by THD, WAC appealed the ZA's determination on the grounds that the ZA's calculation of the HOME-SF percentage was based on a flawed analysis. Recalculating the HOME-SF percentage using WAC and THD corrections, the HOME-SF percentage exceeded 20%, thus disqualifying the project from HOME-SF and the developer's requested extra height and density.

Bottom line: If the ZA's calculations prevailed, the project would qualify for HOME-SF. If WAC and THD's calculations prevailed, the project would not qualify, and a major redesign of the building and a reduction in size would be necessary.

In December, in a decision with which we strongly disagree, the Board of Appeals chose to back the ZA and deny WAC's appeal. While this decision is not surprising, things are not over. There's still a long road ahead, with hearings before multiple City organizations. At a minimum, environmental review must be completed (and is appealable to the Board of Supervisors), and the HPC must consider whether it will approve a COA (reviewable by the Planning Commission and appealable to the Board of Appeals and the Board of Supervisors).

All the while providing once again a clear reminder of the importance of dedicated and informed neighborhood vigilance. And, a strong dose of persistence.

Stay tuned.

To join, or to get information from, the THD Planning & Zoning Committee, just send an email to *PZ@thd.org*.

OUR LOCAL HISTORY
COMES ALIVE

I won't give more away, but the stories are priceless and teach us about the beautiful hill and neighborhood we call home and how it became what it is today. Only through understanding the history can we preserve and enhance this special slice of San Francisco. At the time of writing, our next two tours will be on January 28 and then February 18. Tickets are \$45 with each tour limited to 12 people and starting at 10 a.m. Though the January tour will have taken place by the time this issue is published, I urge you to purchase your ticket for February 18 immediately. (Our November tour sold out within two days of posting.) Go to *THD.org* to sign up.

In other news, our monthly happy hours have proved to be a huge success! On November 30, 2022, we co-hosted a happy hour with Russian Hill Neighbors at the newly opened Cassava, located at the corner of Columbus Avenue and Vallejo Street. More than 70 neighbors attended, which made it our largest happy hour of 2022. We were able to try specialties of Cassava, such as the restaurant's fried chicken, ricotta salad, and burrata toast: All delicious! Special appearances were made by our Supervisor Aaron Peskin and Kristie Fairchild, Executive Director of North Beach Citizens. Thank you to all who came. We hope to see you at our February happy hour, the date and place to be announced by email and social channels.

As a reminder, if you'd like to get more involved, you can learn about volunteer opportunities with THD by reaching out to me at *nick.ferris@thd.org*.



Best-selling author and North Beach local raconteur Gary Kamiya, giving his Cool Gray City of Love walking tour of Telegraph Hill.

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PARKS & TREES REPORT

by Michael Rothmann, Committee Chair
mike.rothmann@thd.org

Recently, control over street trees and the relationships among the City, the neighborhood, and building contractors and developers have centered on the Ficus trees adjacent to 69 Green Street during a renovation of the building.

On May 10, 2022, Kenny Bruzzone, the owner of 69 Green, together with the architecture and design firm Forge SF, applied to remove three ficuses (*Microcarpa nitida*) from the sidewalk adjacent to the property. The application states that “street tree removal [is] required access for renovation work particularly at the facade” and “the existing tree branches also hit the windows & building.” The application was accompanied by a \$420 fee for Permit 792483, consistent with a

non-construction-related removal of one to three street trees, meaning the applicants argued the trees required removal because of tree health or physical structure.

Next, on July 13, 2022, Novo Construction, the firm hired to do the renovation, submitted a letter to San Francisco’s Department of Public Works (DPW) describing how the three ficuses required removal by the city based on the poor health of the trees. In fairness to the property owner, the removal request included replacement of the trees, but a replacement plan isn’t enough to justify removal of healthy mature trees. DPW is short-staffed when it comes to watering teams, so there is no guarantee that any new planting would survive—and, even if it did—it would take many years for any small newly planted trees to mature to full size.

The removal permits were approved by San Francisco’s Bureau of Urban Forestry (BUF) and its



June 2019 view of trees.

© GOOGLE STREET VIEW

arborists. However, thanks to vigilant watchdogs over suspect tree removals, the permit was protested by the public and brought to a Public Works meeting on October 5, 2022. In this initial hearing, Urban Forester Chris Buck explained how the trees were not truly fulfilling any criteria for removal but posing enough risk because the trees were in mediocre condition and their removal would aid construction. This ambiguous reasoning was further complicated by Nicholas Matson, the representative from Novo Construction, who stated that the trees were being removed not for construction but because of the poor condition of the trees.

BUF’s decision to remove was upheld by the City but appealed further by the Telegraph Hill Dwellers. Our appeal was filed on November 14, 2022. THD and other advocates of San Francisco street trees argued that this is a clear case of the City bending to the will of a building owner or developer. The trees could use some maintenance (pruning) but weren’t unhealthy enough for removal, and doing so would not be in the public’s interest.

While our appeal was pending, on December 8, 2022, THD board member Greg Giachino observed the trees being significantly pruned by a private crew. The trees were actually pruned quite professionally and are now much less likely to undergo any type of failure. (We should add that the trees were pruned by the contractors, probably to improve access for construction equipment to the front of the building rather than to enhance the trees’ health.)

Did the contractor just forfeit the right to remove these trees by continuing work during an appeal? Will BUF follow up on its approval to remove them? Should there be any consequences for unauthorized pruning of a tree, let alone when its removal order is under appeal? In 2017, the City voted to transfer responsibility of care and maintenance of all street trees from property owners to taxpayer-funded DPW, so the trees effectively belong to all of us.

The newly pruned ficus trees at 69 Green Street survived several major storms this winter, while hundreds of other trees throughout the City fell. When BUF decides to approve the removal of healthy trees for construction purposes, it is robbing us all, and one has to wonder why.



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Current view of trees at 69 Green Street, after they were privately pruned.

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TRANSPORTATION REPORT

by Howard Wong, AIA, Committee Chair
howard.wong@thd.org

Muni Financial Cliff Isn't New—Just Worse

Muni ridership recovery is at about 54% of pre-pandemic levels, exacerbating a pre-existing financial gap fueled by cost-of-living increases and expenditures. Federal Covid relief funds have sustained Muni operations but will run out by 2024-25, portending significant service and maintenance cuts. Prior to the pandemic, infrastructure/maintenance funds were already being shifted to sustain operations and service. With overall city revenue declining, teleworking (work-at-home) rising, and taxpayers financially stressed, a holistic view of urban organization/structure/systems is needed, where public transit is integrated into the economic, social, and cultural life of the city and region.

Past Muni Expenditures Haven't Advanced Transit Use

Despite tens of billions of dollars in expenditures, San Francisco's pre-pandemic transit modal share remained at 26% of all travel trips, falling to a low of 11% in 2021, with a 49% car share. On-time performance has remained around 55%, below the legally mandated 85%, undermining the reliability metrics that attract riders. Regionally, 70% of commuters drive to work (64% by single-occupant cars), due in no small part to the fundamental lack of transit and uncoordinated existing systems.

Lessons Learned from the Central Subway Project

Ostensibly to benefit Chinatown after the 1989 Loma Prieta Earthquake and Embarcadero Freeway tear-down, the 1.7-mile Central Subway's cost has risen from \$1.57 billion to nearly \$2 billion (more than \$1 billion/mile) and is four years behind schedule. In 1990, an immediate benefit would have been a free bus loop from Moscone Center/Downtown/Union Square to Chinatown/North Beach/Fisherman's Wharf—even more useful today. For the Muni system as a

whole, the Central Subway decreases overall service levels by eliminating the T-Line into the highest-use Market Street metro stations and corridor.

Past Funding Models Need Rethinking

Prior to the pandemic, the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency convened the Transportation Task Force 2030 and Transportation Task Force 2045, which identified funding strategies for the then- pre-pandemic budget gap of \$22 billion. Funding proposals included state/federal grants, General Obligation Bonds, sales tax increases, vehicle license fees, gross receipts taxes, congestion pricing fees, Transportation Network Company fees, and regional transportation taxes—all facing hurdles for legislative and voter approvals, especially for regressive taxes. Another approach is holistic governmental (city, regional, state, federal) planning, budgeting, and financing to prioritize efficient social and economic investments that benefit the most people and trigger the most returns.



Metrobus (Bus Rapid Transit): Double-deck bus in curbside dedication lane on Mexico City's main boulevard.

© HOWARD WONG

Mexico City: A Regional Integrated Transit System

For background, Mexico City is an economically emerging city of 23 million people and 578 square miles, where people work multiple jobs, and economic growth is palpable and social/cultural life thriving. Choking with five million cars and high atmospheric



Metrobus Station Above-ground, center-street enclosure with elevated platform and pre-board fare collection.

© HOWARD WONG

pollution, Mexico City was forced to create an integrated transit network. Driven by air quality/health crises, government planned and budgeted for sustained expansion of its Metro, Metrobus (BRT or bus rapid transit), buses/trolleybuses, microbuses, passenger vans, rail, light-rail, and overhead cable cars. With a single transit card, Metro rides are five pesos (25 cents); Metrobus is six pesos (30 cents); and local buses start at two pesos (10 cents). For five million daily riders, affordable/reliable/frequent transit has gained a 49% modal share, integral to Mexico City's economic, social, and cultural vitality.

Praiseworthy is the Metrobus with dedicated bus lanes, off-board fare collection, and enhanced stations (some resembling above-ground subway stations). Well-designed stops and attractive red buses serve more than one million daily riders—on seven routes, some as long as 19 miles. The Metrobus' elegant simplicity, design quality, and cost-effectiveness are worth emulating. Relatively new, starting in 2005 and expanded through 2018, BRT demonstrates how quickly transit ridership can be increased by high benefits-to-cost investments through strategic government budgeting and financing. San Francisco and the Bay Area deserve no less.



ART & CULTURE REPORT

by Nanci Gaglio, Committee Chair
nanci.gaglio@thd.org

These are the lyrics on one of my favorite Rolling Stones songs on Goats Head Soup album, 1973...

Can you hear the music, can you hear the music?

Can you feel the magic dancin' in the air?

Can you feel the magic? Oh, yeah.

Call it what you will—post-pandemic revitalization or the new roaring 20s—the Magic now happens every single day here in the neighborhood. And more to come. Since I last wrote, we have two jazz clubs that held opening nights just before the holidays.

Keys Jazz Bistro on Broadway at Kearny Street and Savoy Tivoli, 1434 Grant Avenue, will keep the music going live in the neighborhood with local musicians and those who tour the country. Keys serves a New Orleans-influenced dinner menu. The staff are mostly musicians and artists who feel a deep devotion to keeping the music going each night.

Keep an eye out for invitations to "Neighbors Night," where we'll gather and enjoy a night out together at one of the clubs. It'll be a great time to meet new folks and longtime dwellers.

And there's more. As we build out and shape the film series (slowly, and it will happen), there's FalloutSF (falloutsf.com), San Francisco's Punk Community Art Space located at 50-A Bannam Place, just off Grant. It's open each Friday, Saturday, and Sunday from 1 to 8 p.m.

CHECK OUT THE BACK ALLEYS!



Craig Vincent and Farida (Free) Mazlan, cofounders (with Winston Smith) of FalloutSF.

© DAVID LIPKIN

Last week I chatted with Farida Mazlan (aka Free), co-founder of Destroy Art Inc., a management team that took over the space, formerly the studio of artist Winston Smith, quintessential punk surrealist and montage artist of the underground art movement. Free and Destroy Art curators and co-founders started selling Smith's work online during the pandemic as Smith moved from the studio to his ranch in Mendocino. The team soon expanded the webstore to include other artists. See destroyartinc.com, where you can find all the artist names and collections.

More than 40-50 artists' works are currently accessible at FalloutSF, including those by Steel Works (John Yates); Edward Colver, LA-based photographer; Monkey, the vocalist of the former UK band The Adics; Girl Mob, Oakland; and Sick Pleasure, available for purchase. The San Francisco underground scene history at FalloutSF is a growing collection of sculpture, clothing and fashion, illustration, photography, paintings, and collage. A 2023 calendar of events is forthcoming and will include film screenings, DIY Fashion workshops, merch releases, spoken word, and poetry night.

More neighborhood Art & Culture plans are underway, and if you have a few hours per month to spare, please reach out. We have ideas for specialized

one-day festivals that ultimately make our beautiful neighborhood a greater destination than it already is.

When you hear the music trouble disappears

When you hear the music ringin' in your ears

Can you feel the magic floatin' in the air?

Can you hear the magic? Oh, yeah, yeah

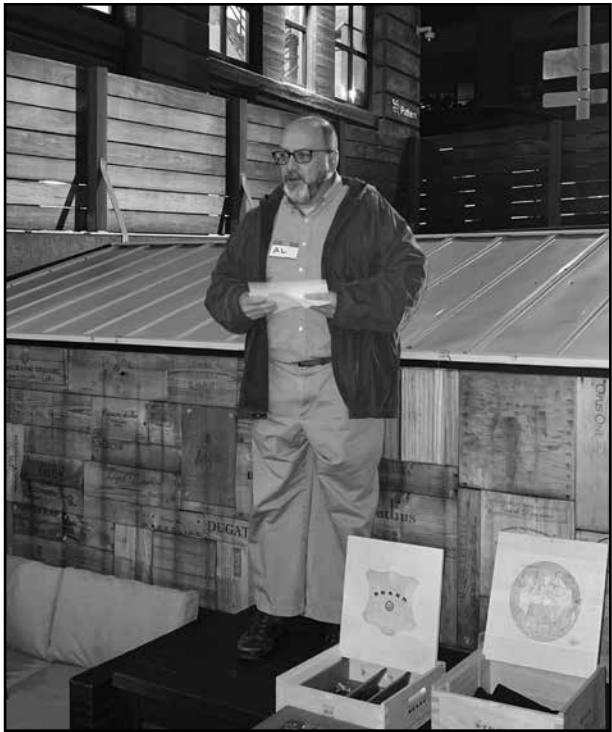
Please use my email, nanci.gaglio@thd.org, to send suggestions or if you'd like to join forces with us. Peace out.



THD HOLIDAY PARTY 2022

THD celebrated the holidays in grand fashion at its annual Holiday Dinner on December 14. Members and guests enjoyed the company of new friends and old at Indie Wine & Beer Bar, 175 Green Street. The outdoor space provided a delightful ambiance for the group to dine on fantastic food and wine. Lots of smiles were had. A big thank you to Brian McGonigle, Charlene Labat, and their team at Indie Wine for making the Dwellers feel so welcome.

ALL PHOTOS © DAVID LIPKIN



VIRTUAL BOARD MEETING HIGHLIGHTS OCTOBER —DECEMBER 2022

by Mary Lipian, Recording Secretary
mary.lipian@thd.org

October 2022

President Fontes welcomed THD's new Waterfront Committee Chair, Greg Chiampou, who introduced himself to the Board. Greg previously served THD as Treasurer.

The neighborhood is welcoming Luke's Local, a grocery and deli, at the corner of Green and Stockton Streets. This will be the third location for the enterprise.

Stan Hayes is the representative for Northern Advisory Committee for the Port of San Francisco.

On Thursday, October 13 at 5:30 p.m., Supervisor Aaron Peskin will discuss the upcoming ballot measures in an event sponsored by THD and Barbary Coast Neighborhood Association.

Toward the end of the meeting, President Fontes and the Board spent time saying goodbye to THD's historian and friend, Termeh Yeghiazarian, who sadly passed away on September 30, 2022. The Board shared memories of her generosity, intelligence, and artistic talent. Termeh started First Fridays and formed the THD Art and Culture Committee. She will be greatly missed.

The Board adjourned the meeting in her honor.

November 2022

Gary Kamiya will lead a special historic walking tour through the neighborhood, beginning at 10 a.m. on November 12. Tickets are priced at \$45 per person. Interested persons should reserve now, as there is limited capacity.

THD and Russian Hill Neighbors will host a joint Happy Hour on Wednesday, November 30 at 5:30 p.m. at Cassava Restaurant located at 401 Columbus Avenue.

Kristin Foley is organizing the THD Holiday Party with the assistance of board members. The Holiday Party will take place on Wednesday, December 14 at 6 p.m. at the Indie Wine and Beer Bar, 175 Green Street. The \$45 price will include dinner and the first glass of wine.

December 2022

No Board Meeting was held in December. ❖



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Parks & Trees: Michael Rothmann michael.rothmann@thd.org
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Waterfront: Greg Chiampou waterfront@thd.org

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Art and Culture: Nanci Gaglio nanci.gaglio@thd.org
Neighborhood Engagement: Nick Ferris nick.ferris@thd.org

PLANNING & ZONING COMMITTEE MEETS last Thursdays
of each month. Call for time and location.
986-7070 or 563-3494 or 391-5652.

LIAISONS WITH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

Central Police District Community Advisory Board: Daryl Babbitt
Coalition for San Francisco Neighborhoods: Al Fontes
Friends of Washington Square: Michael Rothmann
Northeast Waterfront Advisory Group Member: Stan Hayes



by Nick Ferris
nick.ferris@thd.org

TREASURER'S REPORT

And just like that, it became 2023. I am pleased to report that Telegraph Hill Dwellers remains in a very healthy financial position with a net income of \$13,980 for our fiscal year to date. THD has followed a steady course with regard to its budget vs. actual income and expenses. Most significantly, THD recently received a generous bequest of \$10,000 from the estate of Beatrice A. Taggi, cementing our financial strength. We are incredibly grateful for Ms. Taggi's generosity and will ensure

it is carefully used for the betterment of our neighborhood and membership.

During the Holiday Party (a fantastic success—shoutout to Kristen Foley for organizing it!), someone pointed out to me that it was more expensive than in previous years and might have limited accessibility for some members. I was very sorry to hear this, as one of the primary purposes of our organization is to bring people together and build community. Venues have increased rates because of inflation, rising labor costs, and a myriad of other factors, so the costs for activities such as this one have increased for us. THD never profits from events and typically incurs costs. Having said that, I want to emphasize we want no member to feel excluded from an event due to price. Should you or someone you know feel an event might be too expensive for a member, please confidentially reach out to me or anyone on our board, and we'll do our best to assist.



TELEGRAPH HILL DWELLERS

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Term: 2022-2024

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WELCOMING NEW MEMBERS!

There's no better way to be connected to your neighborhood and be a voice of the Hill than by joining Telegraph Hill Dwellers today.

Join at THD.org. If you'd prefer to have a brochure and sign-up form mailed to you, please send an email to membership@thd.org. Already a member? Give one as a gift!

Membership includes:

- A one-year subscription to news & events via email and a quarterly publication, *The Semaphore*.
- Opportunities to be active in your community. Your passion likely aligns to one of many committees.
- Social and Art & Culture events throughout the year—attend and contribute!

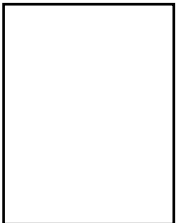
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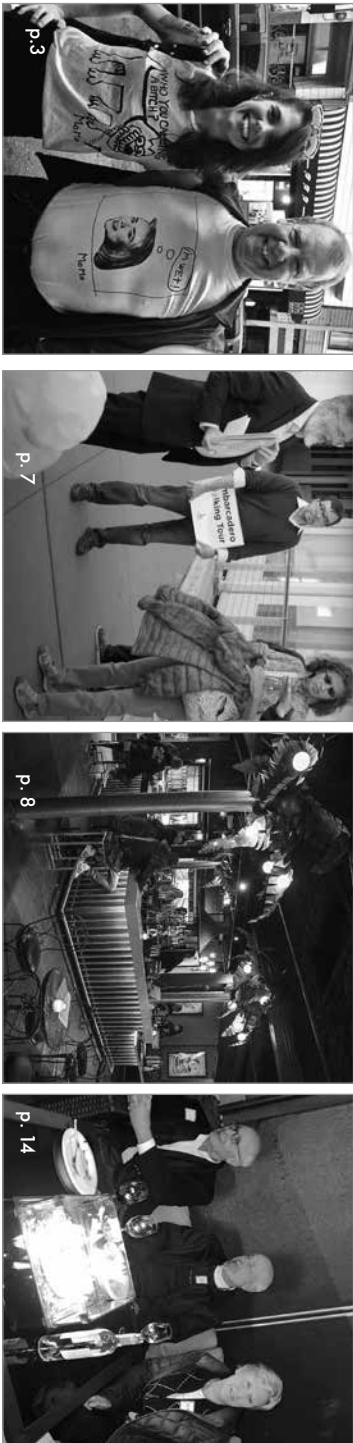


The Semaphore

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Issue 240

Winter 2023



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